

Mark 12:1-17

“Jesus Turns The Tables”

If you've been a believer for any length of time you're familiar with the fact that before the Passover lamb would be sacrificed it would undergo a thorough inspection to insure the fact that it was without spot, without blemish; if its blood was to be shed for the covering of your sin it indeed had to be perfect. and if there were any flaws found upon it, it was rejected and another would be found to be the sacrifice upon whom no imperfections or flaws would be found.

and As we enter in to Mark Ch 12 we find the same thing happening with the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) Who was to be sacrificed for the sin of the world. It's the Tuesday prior to His crucifixion and the religious leaders of the nation of Israel are examining Him *thoroughly*, they're looking for some fault, an imperfection, a weakness or blemish in Him *personally* and finding none He'll be sacrificed shortly, before this week is over He will shed His blood for the sin of the world *collectively* as well as for me and for you *individually*.

It's been a couple weeks since we've been together in Mark's gospel and so as to refresh your memory perhaps you recall that Jesus has just had another run in *with* the religious leaders of Israel and has just been rejected once again *by* the religious leaders of Israel. Sunday He came to town with all kinds of hype and fanfare; it was what has come to be known as His triumphal entry. Monday He cursed a fig tree and cleansed the Temple, overthrowing tables and driving out merchants, and on Tuesday the powers that be want to know the basis of His authority. They were all, “Hey, who do You think You are coming into town with all that fanfare, receiving people's praise, then coming in here and making a scene, driving people out and turning over tables? By what authority are You doing these things and who gave You the authority to do it?”

Jesus said, “I'll answer your question if you answer Mine. The ministry of J.B. was it ordained of God, was John called of God, or was he just doing his own thing with no anointing of God upon his life? Was his baptism from heaven, or from men?” Now John had one mission in his ministry ultimately and that was to point people to Jesus as the Lamb of God sent to take away the sins of the world. and They knew that, so if they said that God called John Jesus would say, “Why then didn't you believe him?” However if they said that God never called John to do what he did the people would freak because they considered John to be a prophet (and rightly so).

So they decided to plead the 5th and say nothing on the basis of the fact that it would incriminate them. They said, “We don't know.” and Jesus said, “Then you *won't* know the basis of My authority.” The point being that Jesus won't play games with us or acquiesce to our whims with no intentions of responding. If you want to know who Christ is, believe me He'll show you. If you have no real desire in your heart to know Him, or know about Him, He knows that to, and He won't entertain your whims.

At this point the Ch breaks but the scene does not; we read in Ch 12 beginning in Vs 1.

Vs1

I suppose there are a few things that we should establish right here from the very beginning isn't there? 1st of all we see that He began to speak to them in parables, now you remember what a parable is; the word parable means to throw, or to "cast alongside." It's been referred to as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning; it's the communication of a spiritual truth, or a spiritual principle through a practical picture. Jesus would draw something out of everyday life and use it to communicate a spiritual truth.

If you weren't interested in the things of the Spirit you'd simply hear a story, but a deeper truth was there if you were willing to search for it and seek it out.

and Here in the 1st Vs Jesus establishes the key elements of the parable. A man planted a vineyard, set a hedge around it to keep wild animals out of it, dug a place for the wine vat in anticipation and expectation of a fruitful endeavor. You don't dig a wine vat if you don't anticipate a harvest, he built a tower as a place of storage and protection, a place where someone could be stationed and keep an eye out for any suspicious activity in or around the vineyard. All the ingredients for an incredible vineyard were in place. Then he leased the vineyard to vinedressers and went into a far country. He leased the vineyard to others that they might work the vineyard and in return he'd receive a portion of the fruit as his pay.

Now we should note from the very beginning that the vineyard *never* belonged to those to whom it had been entrusted, they were allowed to work *in* it and enjoy a good portion of the benefits *of* it, but it wasn't theirs. We should also note that the planting and preparation of the vineyard was done by the owner, they didn't establish the work, he did, they were to cultivate it, tend to it, and take care of it.

and You need to know that when Jesus began to speak of the vineyard in the fashion of a parable it was no mystery that what He was saying was aimed at the nation of Israel specifically. The OT refers to Israel as a vineyard in various places, but the specific place that Jesus was alluding to here would seem to be Isaiah Ch 5 because Vs 2 of Isaiah 5 reads remarkably in like fashion to what we're reading here. The Ch begins, "*Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.*" Isa 5:1-2 It goes on to speak of how everything that could've been done had been done and nothing was really left for the vineyard but judgment, how that God was done investing into it, and now He was going to do away with it.

So there's no mystery where Jesus is headed with this parable, when He speaks of the vineyard He's speaking of the nation of Israel. The one who planted it, established it, made every provision for it, and expected a fruitful return from it was God, and the vinedressers are those leaders of the nation. Those who'd been entrusted to tend to the vineyard, cultivate it, nurture it, bring forth fruit to God from it.

Vs 2-5

I think we get the picture here don't we? No matter who the owner of the vineyard sent to them to receive the reward of his investments (that which was due him) they were vehemently, vindictively and some violently rejected. and You can't help but note the overwhelming

patience and grace with which the owner pursued the vinedressers. Over and over again he would send personal representatives seeking fruit from his vineyard and was consistently greeted with rebellion and rejection.

and Of course He's speaking here of the prophets that God sent to the nation of Israel over and over and over again seeking the fruits of righteousness, calling them to bear fruit worthy of repentance, and yet they were abused, or wounded, or killed. Jesus (when pronouncing woe upon the hypocrisy of the Pharisees) said, *"...I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar."* Matt 23:34-35

We Stephen was witnessing to some of these same guys in Acts Ch 7 he said, *"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,"* Acts 7:51-52 The book of Hebrews says, *"Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth."* Heb 11:35-38 and Yet through it all God continued to reach out in love to the nation, to extend patience and grace, seeking fruit from His vineyard, only to have every witness (ultimately) rejected, the nation as a whole went astray.

Why? We'll see it in a minute. Ultimately it was because the vinedressers didn't want to render the owner his due, they wanted the benefits for themselves, they wanted to enrich themselves and serve their own wants. They weren't interested in honoring the owner of the vineyard, but rather they wanted to profit from it themselves. They were self-centered in their agenda.

Vs6-8

Jesus says that ultimately the owner sent his own son, his one and only son whom he loved with the hope of a better response. A return to obedience and loyalty, the relinquishing of fruit abundantly; but rather than respond rightly they rebelled all the more saying, "Here comes the heir, let's kill him and seize the inheritance for ourselves!" You see if there was no one to claim an inheritance then they'd have the right to seize the estate. So they took the son, killed him and cast him out of the vineyard.

This isn't too hard to decipher is it? and There's a couple of things I want you to see here, because Jesus actually exposes the reality of what's happening even as they're speaking. They were already in the midst of their plans and their plot to have Jesus killed even at that very moment and there in Vs 7 Jesus points out the premeditation with regard to the vinedressers killing of the son. and Even as the son in the parable was cast outside the vineyard so Jesus would be crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. and Of course the self-centered agenda is highlighted again in Vs 7, why did they kill the son? So that the inheritance could be theirs,

personal profit, getting the rightful heir out of the way was necessary for them to be the people in power.

The other thing I'd have you note is found in Vs 6 and that is this; the son was the last opportunity of repentance that they would have. There would be no one else come, if they rejected the son that would be the last straw. We read that he sent him to them *last*; and what would be the result of rejecting the son?

Vs9

Certain judgment and destruction and with that a giving of the vineyard to others. Jesus is telling them that to reject the son (which is an obvious reference to Himself) is to invite the wrath of the Father upon them. and That *should they* reject the Son, there will be no other recourse, no other opportunity, nothing but devastation and destruction awaits the one who rejects the Son. and Jesus prophesies that, that is exactly what they'll do and that the vineyard will go to others who will render to God it's fruit. What's this a reference to? The church, you and me, the body of Christ collectively.

Vs10-11

Here Jesus applies a portion of the Hallel Psalm 118 which the people had been reciting throughout this Passover week. and He's showing them the fulfillment of the scripture, the rejection of the Son, the refusal of the Stone, it's the same thing, the very One that's been rejected is the One who sets everything else in our lives in order.

To those who reject Jesus He becomes a stumbling stone, a rock of offense, to those who receive Him He's the chief cornerstone upon which our lives are built in line with God's purpose and plan.

Now we've looked at this parable in the light of what Jesus was saying to them, but how important we see it not only in it's interpretation, but we also need to glean it's *application* to us. Because in large part this parable has the same heart as did the lesson of the withered fig tree in Ch 11. The Father is looking for fruit in our lives, and He sends people to us, sets people in front of us to share His word, show His love and His desire is that we respond in repentance, bear the fruit of righteousness. But too often people reject the message, rebel against rendering to God the fruit that's due Him, yet He's patient and gracious, He's patient and gracious; He waits, He watches; yet there comes a point whereby if you're not interested in leading a fruitful life, you don't want to repent, you reject the witness of His Son, He will give you over to the consequence of your own ways which is destruction. To the one who rejects Jesus only judgment remains, there is no other way, there is no other witness, no other recourse or resource for salvation apart from the Son. and He will either become a stumbling stone and a rock of offense in your life or the chief cornerstone and the only rock of salvation upon which you stand and to Whom you cling. (In your spare time you might just reference Acts 4:8-12, Eph 2:19-22, and 1 Peter 2:4-8 as further commentary concerning Christ being the chief cornerstone, the rock of our salvation).

Vs12

They should've fell on their faces in repentance, but instead they sought all the more how they might put Him to death, they knew what Jesus was talking about. It's not a difficult parable to understand. and I think we do well to receive the point here that we're not to think that just because God is off in a "far country" that we don't have to respect or reverence His Son. Too

often man mistakes God's patience for impotence, but don't be deceived the day will come when He will reconcile His accounts and to those who have rejected His Son, judgment will come.

God expects fruit from His vineyard, and if God expected fruit from Israel how much more do you think He anticipates fruit from those to whom He's given His Spirit, the full revelation of His word and of His person in Christ? May God search our hearts today, and may He find the fruit of the Spirit abundantly in each heart here individually. and If not may He find hearts eager, willing and ready to bring forth the fruit of repentance.

Vs13-14

The inspection continues, these guys refuse to give up. Now you should know that Pharisees and the Herodians were polar opposites, the Pharisees despised Roman rule, the Herodians were supporters of Herod and they welcomed it because Herod was a puppet of Rome, a man in power. and Because the Pharisees despised the rule of Rome, they didn't care much for the Herodians either, however their mutual hatred of Jesus was stronger than their personal dislike of one another and so they came together to try and catch Jesus in His words. It's a term that means to set a snare, or to catch in a trap (like a hunter might use to snare an animal).

So they try to get Jesus to lower His guard through flattery and walk right into their trap. and I'm just going to tell you that the bible has nothing good to say about flattery, because it's always used to mask an ulterior motive. It's deceitful; think about it, if they really believed what they were saying (even though what they were saying was true) then why didn't they follow Him? It's true; Jesus wasn't a respecter of persons, He did teach the way of God in truth.

So why weren't they His disciples? You see it's hypocrisy, it's deceitful flattery. and They come up with this question, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Now there was more than one tax that the Jews had to pay to the Romans, the tax that's in reference here was the denarius that was paid annually which basically a "we let you live" tax. If you were under Roman rule you paid this annual tax regardless, and for obvious reason the Jews despised it because it sent the clear signal that Rome was in authority over you.

Now for times sake I'm making this short, the bottom line is that if Jesus said pay the tax it would turn the tide of His popularity with the common people because He'd be seen as a supporter of Rome's rule over Israel. However if He said, "Don't pay it" or "You shouldn't pay it" then they'd immediately have Him cited for insurrection and rebelling against Rome and placed into prison to be duly executed. You're between a rock and a hard place right?

Vs 15

Great question isn't it? One that we do well to mark down, memorize and learn from, "Why do you test Me?" How often we're guilty of testing the Lord, "God if you really loved me then..." we throw out the guilt complex trying to get God to do our bidding. "How could a God of love..." and we're testing the Lord, we're tempting Him when the bible is clear that we're not to tempt the Lord our God. Jesus says, "Why do you test Me, bring Me a denarius that I may see it."

Vs16-17

I'm just going to say it. Jesus says, "Pay your taxes, every penny of what you owe." Now you might not like it, agree with it or want to do it but if you're a believer obey the Lord and

pay your taxes. Don't cheat on your taxes, pay them in full. Now, don't pay more than what's required, but pay the proper toll.

Jesus is saying, "Who's image is on the coin?" It's Caesar's, then if you're willing to use the currency to exchange merchandise or personally profit you're by default conceding to Caesar's civil authority. If you are going to use U.S. currency as a means of exchange, and if you're going to benefit from things like police protection, fire departments, military protection, various aid programs if you're unable to work or whatever, then pay what you owe for services rendered. Paul expounds on this in Rom 13, let's look at it quickly together. Romans 13:1-7

and A lot of believers struggle with this because they don't like the fact that government will do immoral things and officiate ungodly actions with tax money. God doesn't hold you accountable for what someone else does. When they receive that money what they do with it is between them and God, we're accountable for what God tells us to do and one of the things He tells us to do is pay our taxes. Submit to civil authority, the only exception being when the 2 come in conflict we obey God rather than man. But there's no conflict with God's word and paying taxes, God's word supports paying taxes.

But the 2nd part of what Jesus said is really what we want to focus on. He says, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and *to God the things that are God's.*" What's He saying? That we're to pay our tax to Caesar and our tithe to God? No, listen; as true as that is (and no doubt encompassed somewhere down in there it would include that) Jesus is speaking about something much larger than the issue of tithing and taxes. You see, Caesar's image was on that coin, Whose image is on/in you? Jesus is transitioning from the physical/material to the spiritual/eternal. Caesar may've crafted that mint and punched out that coin, but God is the one Who's formed you in the inward parts, Who's created you in *His* image. **Gen 1:27, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."**

What's He saying? That money may rightfully belong to Caesar, but *you* rightfully belong to God, you're to give, I'm to give my heart, my soul, the fullness of who I am to Him. and We note that they *marveled* at Him, the wisdom of Jesus left God *glorified*, Caesar *satisfied*, the people *edified* and His critics *mystified*. They marveled at Him, but listen they didn't change did they? They're looking for faults, trying to find flaws, Jesus is turning the tables, showing that the fault really lies in them, they aren't willing to render to God the things that are God's. They're callused to the things of God, nonresponsive and non-repentant.

You know the new year is upon us, what a wonderful way to start out the new year. with a fresh resolve to render to God, the things that are God's, the fullness of your life, your whole heart, you have time, you have talents, you have energy, you have resources, and you bear the image of God, you and all that you are, all that you have rightfully belongs to Him, render it to Him. Say, "God here I am, use me, everything that I have, everything that I am for Your glory, help me, I want to return to that 1st love relationship that I had with You when we 1st met. When I was so willing, so on fire, so unclouded by distracting cares..."

and If you've never given your heart to Christ, there's no better time than the present, the bible tells us that if anyone be in Christ they are a *new creation* old things pass away, and all things are made new. It's a new year, you can have a new life in Christ starting today... Render to God the things that are God's.

Prayer Points:

Father wherever we're at, whatever is going on in our lives teach us what that means, to render to You the things that belong to You. The fullness of who we are, make of us a people in love with You, in line with You, submitted and surrendered to You. Jesus You are the Rock upon which we stand, the chief cornerstone of our salvation, nor is there any other name given among men under heaven by which we must be saved. So we look to You, we entrust all that we are to You, fill us with wisdom, a fresh resolve to follow You, and repentant hearts that we might glorify You.

If God is dealing with you in a way that you've maybe not experienced before, something is stirring in you and you sense that your heart is turning toward God I want to encourage you not to resist that. God wants to make you new, are you willing to render unto Him the things that are His? To give Him your heart, your soul, it's only appropriate, you bear His image, let the Lord have your heart of stone, and let Him give you a new heart of flesh that's pulsating with life, free from condemnation, forgiven of sin.